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House of Representatives

SUPPORT PARALYMPICS!

HON. BOB FILNER

OF CALIFORNIA
IN THE HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. FILNER. Madam Speaker, I would like to call your attention to H.R. 4255, the “United States Olympic Committee (USOC) Paralympic Program Act of 2007.”

This legislation authorizes the Department of Veterans Affairs to provide grants to the United States Olympic Committee (USOC) to plan, develop, manage, and implement a Paralympic Program for disabled veterans and servicemembers.

Paralympics, sports for the physically disabled, traces its origins to World War II when the paralympic movement began to offer sports as a form of rehabilitation for the injured veterans of that era.

Paralympic activity has a proven track record in terms of rehabilitation and improving the quality of life for the physically disabled. Paralympics also improves the mobility, vitality, physical, psychological, and social well-being of disabled veterans while reducing their incidence of secondary medical conditions.

It is particularly important that the thousands of injured military and veterans returning to the United States after service in Iraq and Afghanistan be afforded the chance to participate in such paralympic activities as part of their rehabilitation, both while on active duty and when, as veterans, they return to their home communities.

The United States Olympic Committee is particularly well-suited to plan and institute a Paralympic Program for our military and veterans. In 1998, Congress passed the “Olympic and Amateur Sports Act Amendments,” which charged the USOC with the responsibility of encouraging and assisting amateur athletic programs and competitions for athletes with disabilities. Since that time, the USOC has led a resurgence in paralympic sports in the United States.

When our injured servicemembers began returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, the USOC began offering Paralympic Military Sports Camps at its training

facilities, including at the USOC training facility in my district in Chula Vista, California. To date, over 1,200 injured veterans have been introduced to paralympic sports as a result of these training camps. The USOC has spent millions of dollars on this military and veteran Paralympics Program and will continue to support these efforts. However, with so many injured military and veterans, much more needs to be done.

The paralympic sports camps of the USOC last for a week at a time. The USOC is also beginning an effort to bring paralympic sports to various locations throughout the country. It is imperative that we expand these efforts so that once our injured military personnel graduate to veteran status, they will be able to participate year round in their own communities in paralympic activities as part of their continuing rehabilitation.

Under this program, the USOC will develop community-based Paralympic Programs that provide services and activities for disabled veterans and servicemembers. These activities will include instruction and competition in paralympic sports, training and technical

assistance and other program-specific medical and personal care support activities necessary to create a network of community-based Paralympic Programs easily accessible to our injured veterans.

This legislation also requires the Secretary to conduct an outreach program to inform all disabled veterans about the existence of the Paralympic Program and to encourage their participation. Although non-veterans may participate in these community-based programs, the funds authorized by this legislation can only be used to support activities and services for disabled veterans and servicemembers.

The purpose of this program is to enhance the rehabilitation, readiness, and quality of life of severely injured servicemembers and veterans. There is great urgency to implement this expanded program as quickly as possible in order to motivate, teach, and inspire veterans at all stages of recovery and to return them to a lifestyle full of activity, accomplishment, and enjoyment in their own communities.

I urge my colleagues to support this important piece of legislation. We owe it to those who have given their all for their country.